A Marshall Cavendish Publication 41 In Fortnightly Parts

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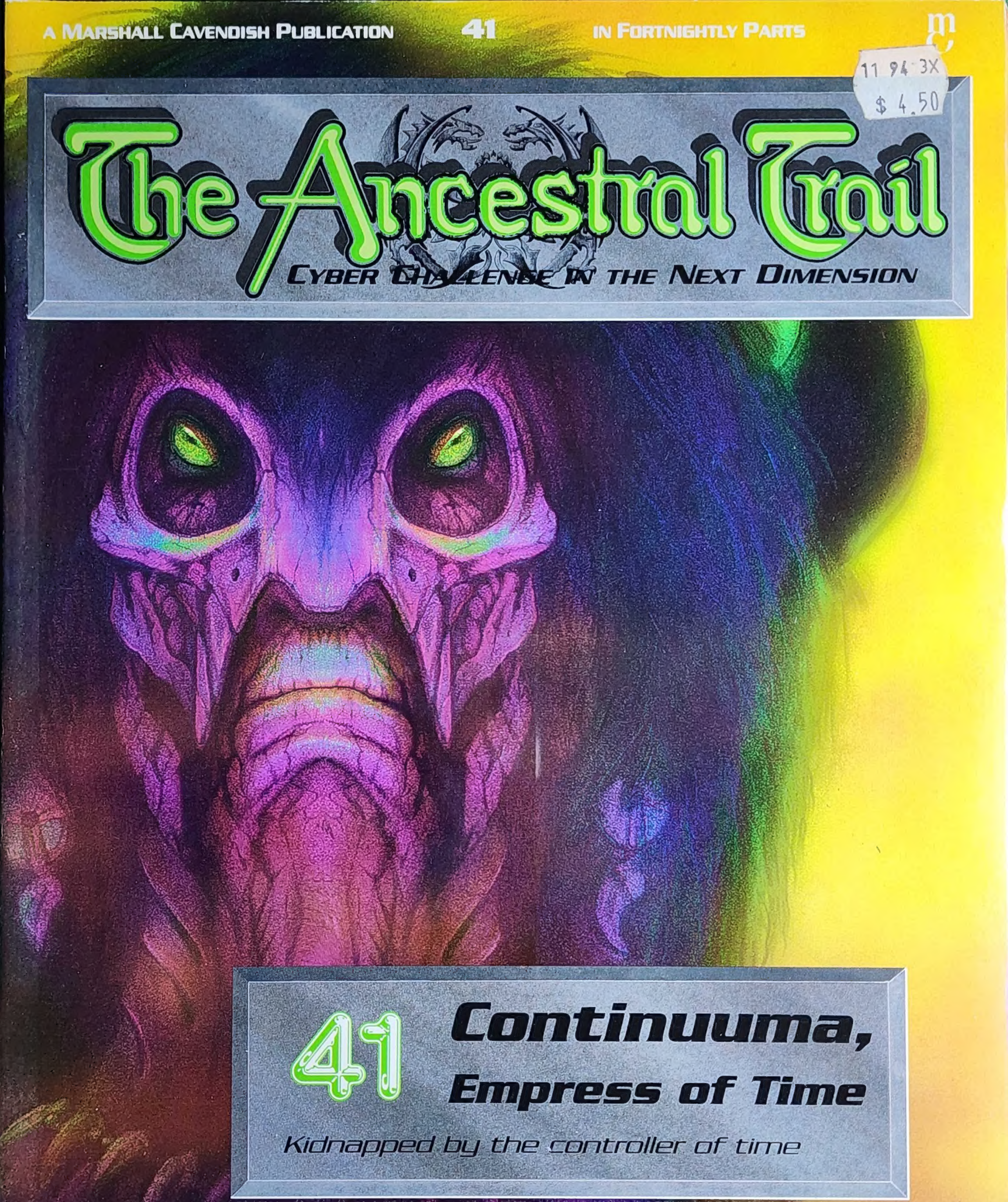
The Ancestral Trail

Cyber Challenge in the Next Dimension



41 Continuuma, Empress of Time

Kidnapped by the controller of time

Julek Heller

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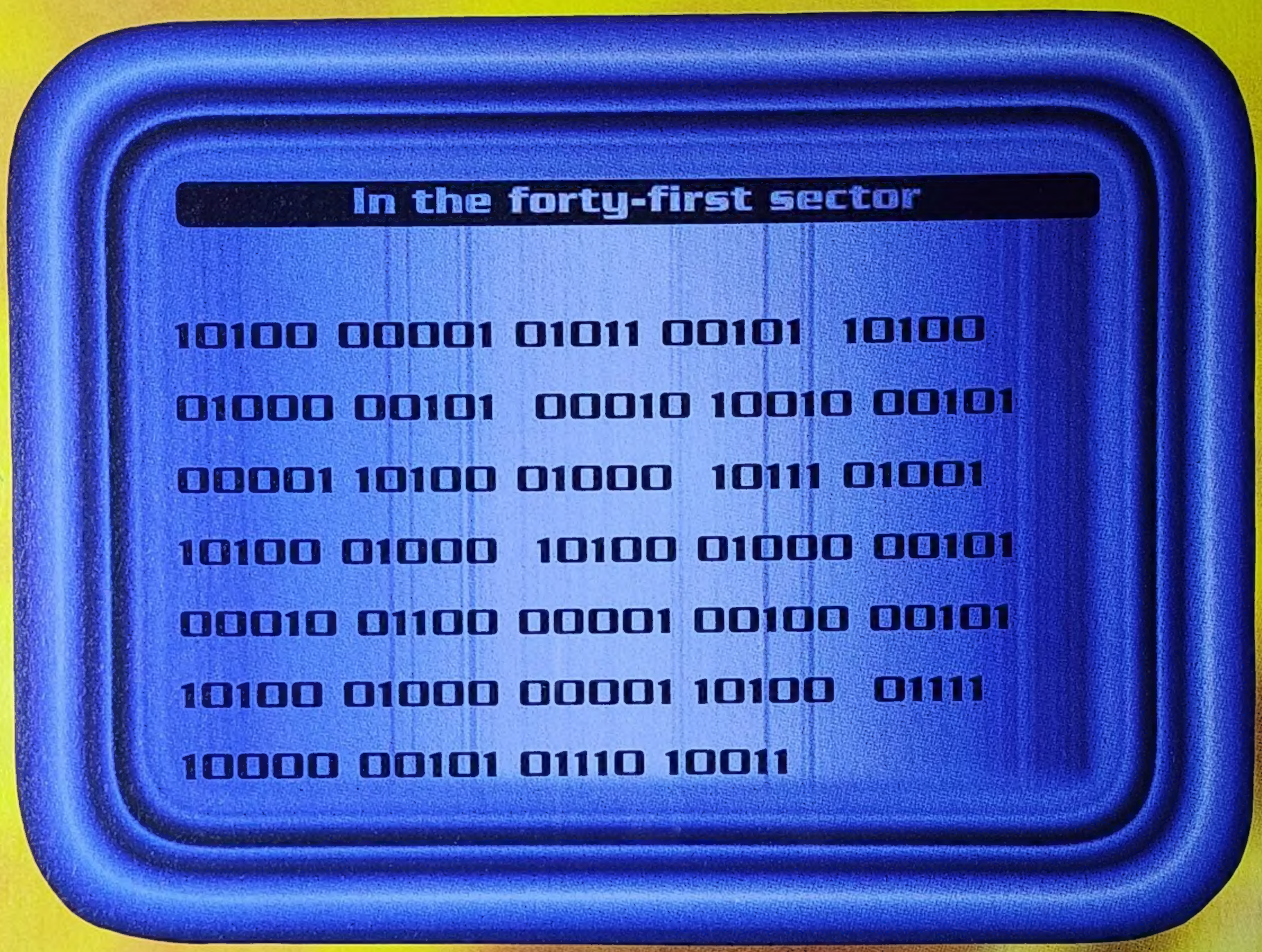


Computer graphics produced by Mehau Kulyk

Missiles blotted out the cyber skies like a plague of hungry locusts. Desperate to evade the deadly projectiles, Richard pulled back on the cyber cruiser's joystick to increase speed.

"It's no good," he cried. "They're gaining on us!" Then he had a sudden idea.

Richard thought back to when he was being pursued by the pekods. On that occasion Robo had been able to add his power supply to the cyber cruiser's and make it go faster. Perhaps if they tried the idea again it could help them now. He quickly told the robot his plan.

A buzzing noise came from Richard's companion as he inserted one of his metallic arms into a small socket at the back of the flying machine. Instantly, there was a burst of speed from the cyber cruiser. The sleek machine shook and vibrated as it sliced a path through the air.

Imminent explosion

Richard looked over his shoulder and saw to his dismay that the ploy had not worked. The missiles were still getting closer and closer to the cyber cruiser.

"Robo!" he yelled through gritted teeth, "I can't make it go any faster!" As the words left Richard's lips, he realized that it was too late. The guided missiles were already upon them.

Then something unexpected happened. Instead of the violent explosion that Richard had been bracing himself against, the missiles passed harmlessly through the cruiser. They were not real.

"What happened?" Richard gasped as he slowly decreased the cruiser's speed.

"Missile attack was an illusion," Robo replied. "Sensors were deceived."

Richard cleared his throat. "They seemed real enough to me!" he exclaimed.

IN THE GARDEN

The pair flew on for a while until Richard decided that it was safe to land. All the recent excitement had left him feeling tired and aching. "Let's take a rest," he said to Robo. "It will give you the chance to re-charge your batteries."

"Energy banks," the robot corrected.

As Richard guided the flying machine towards the ground, a worrying thought occurred to him. He wondered who had created the illusion of the missiles. Could it have been a final attack from an enraged Kentar? Or was someone or something else trying to scare him away from this place?

A gentle pall of dust rose into the air to tell Richard that the cyber cruiser had landed. He shuffled his worries to the back of his mind.

The two companions climbed out from the cyber cruiser to be greeted by an unearthly scene. All around them, the landscape was dotted with strange shapes.

"What can they be?" Richard asked, regarding the objects quizzically.

Everywhere he looked the objects seemed to be sprouting from the ground. Their acorn-like torsos were topped with bizarre organic caps that resembled the turrets of an Arabian castle.

Robo's sensors scanned the odd shapes. "Sophrites," he eventually announced. "Plant organisms."

Richard shuddered. He recalled his last encounter with a plant – the awesome

Identico. Nervously, he made to climb back aboard the cyber cruiser. Then something caught his attention.

Richard sniffed and felt his tummy rumble as a distinctive odour filled the air.

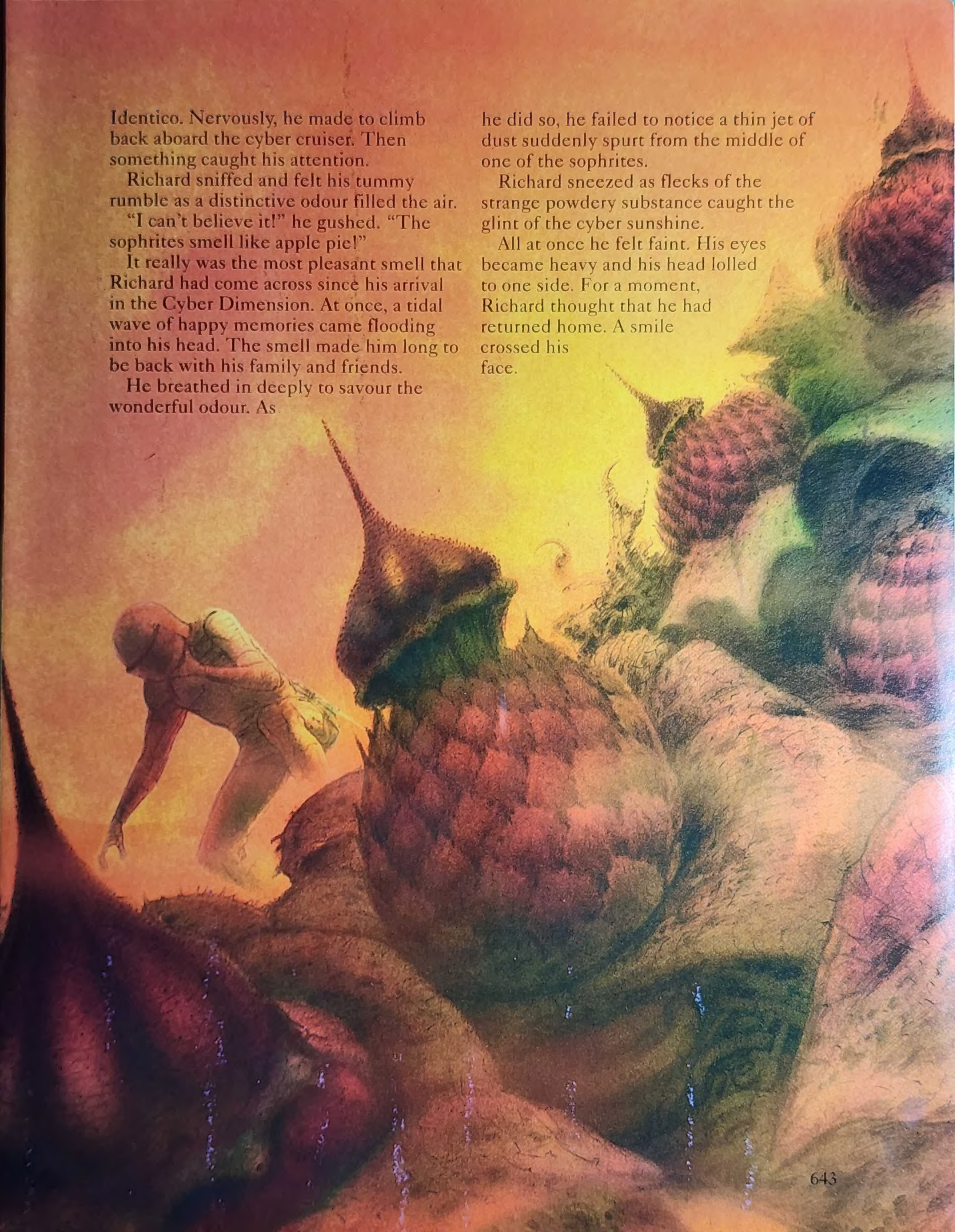
"I can't believe it!" he gushed. "The sophrites smell like apple pie!"

It really was the most pleasant smell that Richard had come across since his arrival in the Cyber Dimension. At once, a tidal wave of happy memories came flooding into his head. The smell made him long to be back with his family and friends.

He breathed in deeply to savour the wonderful odour. As he did so, he failed to notice a thin jet of dust suddenly spurt from the middle of one of the sophrites.

Richard sneezed as flecks of the strange powdery substance caught the glint of the cyber sunshine.

All at once he felt faint. His eyes became heavy and his head lolled to one side. For a moment, Richard thought that he had returned home. A smile crossed his face.



The sound of galloping hooves brought Richard back to his senses. His smile vanished and his eyes widened in surprise as he realized that everything had changed. He was no longer standing in the field of sophrites. In its place was a barren desert of red, sun-baked sand dunes. Apart from the occasional cluster of rocks, the only other features of the desolate scene were the tortured shapes of enormous cacti that reached up to the skies.

Richard turned to face the source of the noise and saw a group of faint dots heading towards him from the distant horizon. They were followed by a cloud of dust.

He watched in bemusement as the shapes grew bigger. As they got closer, their outlines became clearer. Richard drew his sword and realized what he was looking at. An inner voice told him that he must be mistaken, but the evidence of his own eyes suggested otherwise. "Indians!" he exclaimed. "Those are Red Indians. What are they doing here?"

The sound of the hooves intensified. It was accompanied by a high-pitched screeching noise that Richard was also familiar with. He had heard it many times in films and on TV. It was a tribal war cry.

Richard flinched as a razor-sharp arrow fizzed by him and struck a nearby cactus. Standing on his tip-toes, he scanned the surroundings anxiously for somewhere to hide. More arrows were launched as he found what he was looking for and ducked behind a group of rocks.

ENCIRCLED

The Red Indians were now so close that Richard could clearly see their features. There were about a dozen of them. They had long black hair and their faces were streaked with brightly coloured war paint.

There was however one feature they all shared which set them apart from the pictures of Red Indians with which Richard was familiar. They appeared to be held together by shiny rivets. They were metallic robots.

The mechanical Indians drove their robotic horses into a circle around Richard's hiding place. Their chants grew louder as Richard desperately looked for a means of escape. Suddenly, a female voice could be heard and the chanting ceased.

"Who dares to enter the land of Continuuma, empress of time?" said the voice.

From the midst of the circle a tall, spindly figure slowly emerged. Dressed in a black, loose-fitting cloak and clutching a sharply pointed spear, the creature moved towards Richard.

"Speak up!" the newcomer demanded.

Richard forced himself to turn his eyes away from Continuuma's frightening gaze.

"My name is Richard," he nervously replied.

"Why have you trespassed into my world?" asked Continuuma.

Richard cleared his throat. "I'm sorry," he said, "I didn't realize that I was trespassing."

The female figure glowered angrily. "Ignorance of my law is no excuse," she said. "You must pay."

"Pay?" Richard responded. "What do you mean?"

Imprisoned

Continuuma moved closer to Richard so that he could see deep into her eyes. The smell of her fetid breath mingled with the odour of her perfume, which reminded Richard of burning rubber. He screwed his nose up in disgust.

Continuuma spoke again. "Interloper you are mine," she said. "Anything that enters my world belongs to me."

As she spoke, Richard noticed something else that was strange about his captor. Set in her leathery neck was a pair of gills that opened and closed when she spoke.

Richard bravely climbed to his feet. "Look, this is all a mistake," he pronounced. "Let me be on my way and I'll trouble you no more."

"Foolish boy!" Continuuma cackled. "Do you think that I would let you go?"

Richard shrugged. He knew that he would have to think fast if he was going to get away from the dreadful creature standing before him. He looked around for Robo but there was no sign of his robotic companion.

"Nobody can help you here," Continuuma gloated. "In this land I am queen. In all worlds and dimensions there is only one that I serve."

"The Evil One," Richard said.

Continuuma's evil green eyes widened in surprise. "You seem to know a lot," she said. "Who told you of this?"

"Nobody," Richard lied.

EVIL TRANSFORMATION

The towering figure of Continuuma loomed over Richard as she looked at him intently. She gave a short gasp of rage before raising a wrinkled finger and pointing it towards her captive. "I know you!" she said.

"I think you must be mistaken," Richard replied, fidgeting nervously.

"Oh, there's no mistake," she continued. "You are the Chosen One."

Richard could see no point in denying it. He nodded in affirmation.

Once more, Continuuma laughed. "Well, well, this is my lucky day – my chance to repay a few debts."

Richard looked on in confusion as Continuuma began to wave her arms around frantically.

"We've never met but we have a mutual acquaintance," she smiled.

"What do you mean?"

"Perhaps this will jog your memory," Continuuma continued.

Without warning the air around Continuuma began to churn. Brightly-coloured lights danced around her bony frame to form a halo that served to mask her appearance.

Richard desperately scanned the immediate area for an escape route but the robot Indians watched him intently. He knew that he would not be able to get past them. Turning his attention back to Continuuma, Richard saw that, beneath the blanket of lights, her shape was beginning to alter. She was getting bigger; her face was filling out and her limbs were becoming more muscular.

All at once the transformation was complete. Richard found himself looking at the giant form of a monstrous green lizard. "Recognize me now?" said the voice of Continuuma.

Richard thought for a moment and then remembered where he had seen this shape before. It wasn't exactly the same but it was similar enough to send a shiver down his spine.

The last time he had encountered a shape-shifter, one of its incarnations had resembled a lizard.

"I believe that you have crossed paths with a cousin of mine. I'm sure that if he were here now he would like me to look after you."

"Holotron!" Richard exclaimed. "He is your cousin."

"Was my cousin," sneered Continuuma. "Before he met you, that is!"

Waving her forked tongue through the air, the lizard creature crawled towards Richard. He gripped the handle of his sword tightly and prepared to fight.

A flash of bright light temporarily blinded Richard. He felt himself being lifted off his feet and thrown through the air. When he landed he got a surprise.

As his eyes cleared he realized that he was no longer standing in the red sands. He was standing knee-deep in brown, slimy mud.

TRENCH WARFARE

He shook his head in confusion and saw that the desert had disappeared. It had been replaced by a dark, gloomy landscape that was filled with the smell of burning. Suddenly, there was an enormous explosion nearby. Shards of metal and clumps of soggy earth showered over Richard. "Look out!" a voice cried.

"Where am I?" Richard called, turning to see that a rusty robotic figure dressed in a soldier's uniform was standing right next to him.

"No time for talk now," came the reply. "Follow me!"

His mind reeling, Richard quietly stepped in behind his mechanical companion. He was led to a bunker that was lined with bags of sand. A gun was thrust into his hand. More explosions could be heard in the distance.

Richard watched as the robot beside him unclipped a small object from its belt. It was a hand grenade. Pulling

the pin out with a pair of shiny, metallic teeth, the robot hurled the grenade into the distance. Moments later there was an explosion that came from the place where the grenade must have landed.

"Who are you fighting?" Richard asked.

"Don't know, don't care," answered the robot. "The war's been going on for so long that everyone's forgotten."

Richard thought for a moment. "Why don't you stop fighting, then?"

The robot rolled its synthetic eyes. "Can't do that," it said. "I'm a fighting robot. My only function is to fight. Without the war I'd have nothing to do."

"But isn't it dangerous?"

"Dangerous? Yes it's dangerous alright," considered the robot. "Fun though."

The robot may have been enjoying the fighting but Richard certainly wasn't. As a shell whistled past him, he wondered if he was ever going to get out of the strange new land he found himself trapped in.

Voice of Evil

Without warning, the robotic soldier beside him exploded into a thousand pieces. This time, an enemy shell had found its target.

As Richard turned to survey the wreckage of his brief acquaintance, the booming voice of Continuuma could be heard.

"How about a change?" she sneered. "Something to 'wet' your appetite."

Richard looked on in astonishment as the puddles of dirty water at his feet began to deepen. In moments, the murky waters had risen above waist level.

Richard tried to call out but ended up swallowing a mouthful of water as the level continued to rise. In no time at all he was totally submerged in the filthy liquid. He also found that he was caught in a strong current that threatened to drag him away to his doom.

Another guise

Through his panic, Richard noticed something else. Although he was now completely underwater, he was having no trouble breathing! Taking a chance, he inhaled a small gulp of water and discovered that his suspicions had been correct. Something was stopping him from drowning.

His relief was short-lived. Through the dirty waters Richard could see a large shape heading towards him. He gave a gasp of fear. It was a shark.

The creature moving swiftly in his direction was no ordinary shark. It was enormous. The grin on its flattened snout revealed a menacing set of silvery teeth. The creature spoke: "Guess who?" it said in a voice that Richard instantly recognized as belonging to Continuuma.

The empress of time had changed her appearance once more. With a sweep of her gigantic tail, she sent Richard spinning in slow motion through the cyber waters. "Want to play?" Continuuma sneered, moving behind Richard and nudging him with her flattened nose.

Richard tried to collect his thoughts and

realized that he was still holding his sword. Fighting against the resistance of the water he swung its blade towards his fast-moving tormentor.

FINAL ATTACK

Continuuma laughed at her young adversary's feeble efforts, before swinging around and swimming into the distance. Richard watched as she turned about and prepared another attack.

Richard knew that any attempts at getting away from the dreadful creature would be fruitless. Grimly, he remained where he was and waited.

"Here I come!" smiled Continuuma, gathering speed as she powered towards her prey. "Your time is up!!"

Richard could not help wishing that Robo was beside him as Continuuma sped towards him. Perhaps the robot's binary panel would have provided the answer to his current predicament. In desperation, he tried to concentrate on Continuuma's mighty form. He wracked his brains in an attempt to seek out his opponent's vulnerable spot.

THE TABLES TURN

Continuuma was almost within reach of him when Richard had the germ of an idea. Since her first appearance, the empress of time had assumed three separate guises. All three had possessed gills. "Perhaps they are her weakness," Richard mused aloud. He knew that there was a good chance he was wrong, but as the shark powered towards him Richard aimed his sword towards her gills.

Continuuma's mighty jaws gaped open as she focused in on her prey. However, she did not see Richard raise his sword just at the last moment and sink the blade into her gills.

An ear-splitting scream told Richard that his aim had been true.

Continuuma began to change shape again. This time she was reverting back to her original form. Before Richard's wary eyes she began to resemble the creature he had first encountered with the robotic Indians in the red desert.

"No... no!" she screamed. "Chosen One, why have you done this to me!"

As she changed appearance, so the waters of the cyber ocean evaporated away and were replaced by a setting with which he was more familiar.

Richard watched as Continuuma faded away to nothing and disappeared forever. Overcome with relief, he looked around and realized that he was now standing back in the field of sophrites. There was not trace of the mighty ocean that had so recently engulfed him.

He scanned the horizon of the strange world to see if he could locate the squat form of Robo. His companion was nowhere to be seen. "Robo! Where are you?" he called, but there was no answer.

Deadly plants

It was then that Richard remembered the danger of the sophrites. His hazardous adventures in the bizarre lands of Continuuma had begun when one of the plants had fired the strange powder at him. He decided that it would be in his best interests to leave the sophrite field as soon as possible.

Craning his neck, Richard looked about him and tried to find the cyber cruiser. He heaved a sigh of relief when he spotted it and realized that the flying machine was only a short walk away.

As he made to move off, he noticed that one of sophrites had opened its petals and was preparing to fire some more powder in his direction. Before he had time to react, Richard felt something wrap itself around his arms and upper torso. He struggled for a moment, before realizing that there was no escape from his new bonds. He was totally helpless. It was impossible to move.

"Robo!" he cried once more in desperation. "Help!"

Richard's heart sank as he realized that he was all alone. His robotic companion had vanished into thin air and left him abandoned in the field of deadly plants.

The sophrite fired its powder.

SHOOMI'S SANCTUARY

Enter into the Cyber Dimension and engage optical recognition to find...

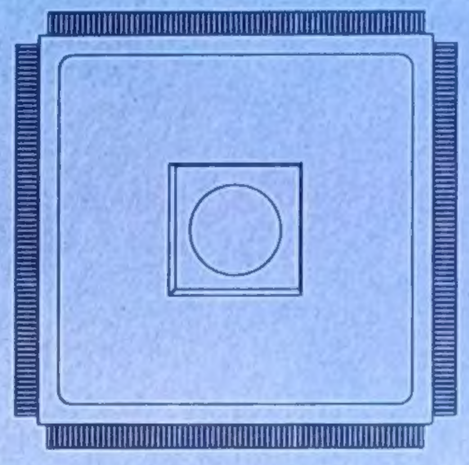
▶ Shoomi and Shoobi

Richard and Robo's twin shadows are still keeping up with our heroes' every step. Study the illustrations in this issue and see if you can uncover Shoomi and Shoobi in under three minutes.

In issue 40 Shoomi and Shoobi were on page 608.

▶ Computer Challenge

Hidden somewhere in this issue is a vitally important computer component from the sinister Cyber Dimension. Use your visual skills to help Richard and his friend Robo locate it in less than three minutes.
When you have discovered the component's hiding place, can you guess what it is and what its function might be?



In the last issue a computer micro processor was hidden on page 620. Processors are the most important part of a computer. Usually made from silicon, they are the "brain" that controls every action of the computer. Although small in size, processors are able to deal with enormous amounts of digital information. They are used to give the computer instructions so that it is able to produce pictures and sounds.

▶ Competition Details

When you have collected 26 letter blocks, you will be given a clue which will help you form them into a sentence that reveals the fatal flaw in the Cyber Dimension. The prize for the competition is a super Sega Mega Drive, complete with a copy of the great new role-playing game Shining Force.
Details on how to enter the competition will be given in a later issue.
NB. The competition will be open to residents of the UK and Eire only.

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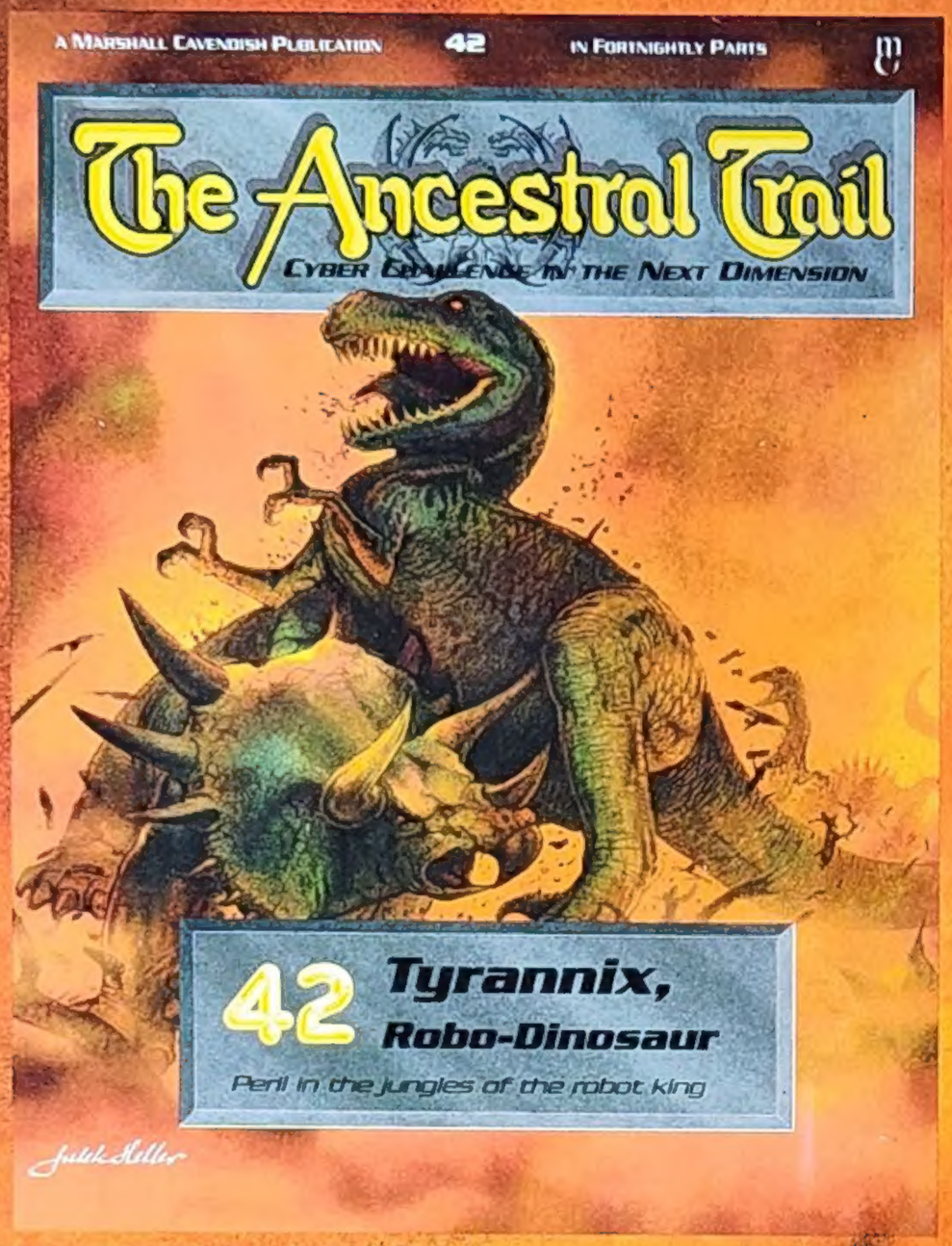

In Issue 42

Tyrannix, Robo-Dinosaur

In the midst of a blazing inferno, Richard comes under attack from pre-historic robots. Can he escape a raging forest fire and rescue Robo before it is too late?

plus

- ▶ More **Techscan** cards
- ▶ 4 more **Cyber Power** cards

Coming in Issue 43

Galaxia, Anti-matter Alien

Richard makes a new friend and faces the threat of a creature who is powered by an anti-matter furnace. Only the cyber cruiser can save him.

plus

2 more **Techscan** cards ▶ 2 more **Cyber Power** cards
▶ More **Cyber Chess** playing pieces.

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